



INDEXA

Helping to Make DX Happen Since 1983

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A non-profit organization for the enhancement of amateur radio,
worldwide peace, and friendship

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Amsterdam Island—2014 . . . The Hay is in the Barn By Jay Slough, K4ZLE



Four INDEXA directors chose to “be DX” for this DXpedition. Bob Schenck, Bob Allphin, Jerry Rosalius and Ralph Fedor fly the colors for INDEXA. Off-island INDEXA director, Gregg Marco, provided IT support.

Licensed in 1958, I have been an active DXer *only* since 1968. However it took me 31 more years to become a member of INDEXA. My good friend, Pick, WA5PAE, (SK) moved into our neighborhood and was a control operator for the INDEXA information net. He and I had a lot in common and became best friends. We made several joint DXpeditions to Guantanamo Bay as KG4IZ and KG4MO, respectively. He was the kind of person your momma wanted you to hang out with. If he thought INDEXA was worth sup-

porting, then so did I. As a result I became life member, number 3436, on 1 February 1999. Pick was right, INDEXA is an organization worth supporting.

I say all that to say this, compared to some DX oriented organizations, we may be small and we may not be able to contribute monetarily as much as some, but our influence casts a disproportional giant shadow. The 2014 Amsterdam Island DXpedition is a case in point. Over half of the current INDEXA board of directors were either on the trip or were actively engaged in making the trip a reality. In addition, over half the team are INDEXA members! That is pretty good representation from an international group of operators.

Planning for this trip began two years before it became a reality. Ralph Fedor, K0IR, was our team leader and had actually planned to activate a different top tier entity somewhat in the same vicinity when another group announced their intention to activate that one. Being the gentleman he is, Ralph quietly backed off and

inside... Meet INDEXA Director Gregg Marco, W6IZT

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sought an alternate entity. He spent 15 months of intense effort to make FT5ZM a reality.

Getting ready for winter, the smart farmer prepares. Part of that preparation is getting the hay in the barn. In regards to FT5ZM, the hay is in the barn and consumed. I am sure all will agree that the planning and preparation phase set us up for an excellent execution phase. Once again the old "7-P" adage was proven to be true—*Proper Prior Planning Prevents Pee Poor Performance*, or, stated positively—*Proper Prior Planning Produces Picture Perfect Performance*.

Prior to this operation Amsterdam Island was ranked #4 on *The DX Magazine* most wanted list and #7 on the DX Coffee list. It is politically part of the TAAF (Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises), which includes the following territories:

- Kerguelen
- Amsterdam and St. Paul
- Crozet
- Adélie Land (French Antarctic claims)
- Îles Éparses (French islands around Madagascar)

Amsterdam Island has one populated settlement of 20 French scientists and support personnel. These folks spend one year of duty on this volcanic rock that measures approximately 24 square miles. There is a 100% change of the guard, so to speak, that happens every year in September. Their main functions, other than maintaining a physical presence to support French territorial claims, are:

- Weather monitoring
- Laboratory of Physiochemistry of the Atmosphere—collecting and measuring atmospheric pollution
- A Geophysical Laboratory which measures the earth's magnetic field
- Seismic wave monitoring—tsunami warning
- Ecological studies—Amsterdam Albatross, rock-hopper penguin, elephant and fur seals, phylica aborea (a tree found only



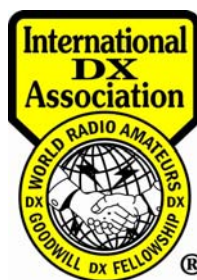
The Martin-de-Vivies Research Station on the northeast corner of the island is home for the scientists who remain on the island for a 12 month tour before returning to the motherland. Operating base Antonelli is up and to the right from here and Mataf is down to the left. The landing jetty is in the foreground at water's edge.

here, and on Tristan da Cunha and Gough Islands)

This is very isolated duty as they are only supplied every three months by sea. There is no airstrip and they do not even have their own boat or dinghy. Once on the island, they are there for the duration unless there is need for an emergency evacuation and that can be a lengthy process since it requires access from sea. Amsterdam Island is

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about halfway between the southwest coast of Australia and Cape Hope, South Africa. It took 9 days each way on the R/V Braveheart between our point of departure, Fremantle (Perth), Australia. and Amsterdam itself.

To illustrate how sensitive they are to their isolation and commitment to safety I relate the following info. While there, we did some repair to one of their antenna systems and wanted to climb their 70 foot tower, which is at least the size of Rohn 45G and solidly planted. We were not allowed to climb for fear of falling and needing medical treatment beyond what their staff physician or our team doctor could provide. It takes several weeks to get approval for such a climb from HQ back on Reunion. That would come only after a detailed operational plan is submitted explaining the need and proposed process. The "tower elves" could not even make the climb at night!

Similarly, each of our team had to submit certain requisite medical documentation to the TAAF authorities which included copies of EKGs (pre and post exercise) as well as medical doctor and dentist statements of fitness to travel.

Back to their scientific monitoring—their equipment could plot our progress toward them from many days out by the increase in carbon emissions from our exhaust!. After our initial couple of nights on the air, we had to cease operations on 40 meters and below from the Mataf site because of interference to their magnetic field detection equipment.

We were greeted with open arms upon our arrival and departed with sadness when our time there was done. We felt quite welcome from the very beginning and fell into the island routine very quickly. We stayed in a dorm type building with two men to a room and were assigned duties as "Petite Marie" where one of us would help the staff clean the common area (chow hall/recreation area/bar) and help with meal set up/clean up daily.

After the initial welcome and indoctrination formalities, we set about setting up. It did not take long to "take care of business" and get on the air. For set up we were divided into two teams, one for each site and with the help of the island cadre and the Braveheart crew we were off and running. Arnie, N6HC, made the first QSO of the expedition that afternoon from Mataf.

There were two operating sites in preexisting cabins. Mataf was only about 0.6 miles from the base, back down the beach. The other site, Antonelli, was situated up toward the main peak of the island, about 1.6 miles away on the edge of a caldera. It took between 45 minutes and an hour and a half to walk up to Antonelli from the base because of a 600 foot plus altitude gain and traversing the volcanic rock path. The grass was thick once you traversed just a short distance from both cabins making antenna erection somewhat of a chore, especially at Antonelli. That loose volcanic under-footing also contributed to the challenge.

Because of the rough terrain, the seal's propensity to sleep in the tall grass coupled with their aggressive nature, we were not allowed to travel at night. As a result the shifts were either 24 hours for Antonelli or 12 hours for Mataf. We would operate until the bands died or we were too tired to continue and then we'd "catch a few ZZZ's" in one of the bunks in the cabins. It was almost like working a 20 day "sprint" contest with the advantage of having an excellent support staff taking care of the non-operating essentials. The Braveheart crew kept the generators serviced and fueled as well as running chow for us.



Mataf Power & Light. Because Amsterdam Island is a Nature Preserve and because it is also the right thing to do, we ran our generators in modified, depleted fuel containers from the Braveheart. That way any 'spills' would be completely contained and not harm the environment. The same set up was replicated at Antonelli. We used two 6 KW gasoline generators at each site. One generator powering two stations and one 3.5 KW generator per site as a spare. The 3.5 KWs were not needed, but it was better "prepared and spared" than being unprepared.

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Amsterdam Island is located at 37° 49' S. My QTH in OH is at 39° 43' N. We have snow in Ohio, but it never snows on Amsterdam. The weather is moderate year round, with temperatures in January and February between the mid 50's and high 60's F. Remember that is their summer. However, those are averages and you know what they say: If you stand with one foot in ice water and one in boiling water, on average you are comfortable! While on the island we had a couple of nights with blowing misty rain and temperatures in the 40's. One of our stations at Mataf was on the porch and even with tarps to shield us from the wind and cold, operating that position was a challenge. We were reminded that this was NOT a fly-in expedition!

While on the subject of physical location, there are only three land masses antipodal to CONUS. They are Amsterdam Island, St Paul Island and Kerguelen Island. (No, you do not come out in China as we were told as kids if we dug a hole straight through the earth from the US!) Amsterdam's antipode is near Logan, CO. As a result it was pretty much the same distance from the US to FT5ZM for US stations regardless of which direction you pointed your beam. Of course, propagation did not exist for all paths so you had to be pointed in the proper direction for best results. Because of the grass, nesting seals and/or unsure footing, we seldom changed beam direction during hours of darkness.

Initially we had some confusion with applying the correction for magnetic declination. If you check it out, you will find that on Amsterdam there it is in excess of 35 degrees declination. That is significant, even for a 3 el yagi! We did our best to get 'er right, but sometimes it was better to point for rejection of unwanted signals vs. highest strength from wanted signals. Know what I mean, Vern?

So we operated from 26 January until 12 February and made in excess of 170,000 Q's. We were surprised and pleased at how well 10, 12 and 15 meters played. We had a betting pool on guessing total Q's before we began operations and even the most optimistic soul on the team missed the number by about 15,000. As we hit each milestone, 100,000, 125,000, etc. the island staff celebrated with us and were very much engaged in our activities. I will not go over various breakouts of the numbers, but there were over 36,000 unique calls in our logs and for almost

7,300 people it was an all time new one!

We had to shut down a little earlier than originally planned due to anticipation of bad weather. (Do any expeditions get to run the full time they plan?) I had the honor of making the last QSO the morning we finally closed shop. I knew we were close to the 170,000 mark so I went down to Mataf right after breakfast and operated until they threatened to either kill me or kill the generator. I personally opted for the later!

We used K3s with KPA500s and OM2000s, 4 stations at each site. Everything worked as advertised, except for one minor glitch on a power switching FET in one of the rigs, which was fixed in short order. Beam antennas at Mataf were furnished by Force 12 before it was acquired by Innovatenna and the ones at Antonelli were K5GO designs from Cycle 24 before it was acquired by DX Engineering. I should thank other suppliers, but suffice it to say, we could not have done it without the likes of those already mentioned, W3YY, W16R, and other commercial enterprises.

If you worked us on 160, you can thank Nodir, EY8MM; Erling, LA6VM; Ralph, K0IR, and others (mainly members of the Braveheart crew) who completely innovated on modifying our original 160 m vertical and making it more than twice the height originally planned. (See photo, next page.) Although I did not personally operate 160m from FT5ZM, I am very proud of the effort expended by those who did. Those guys put almost 3600 Q's in our log for top band!

Part of what made that tall 160m antenna possible was the aluminum tower sections lent to us by the Northern Corridor Radio Group from Western Australia. Not only did those guys lend us the tower sections, they handled airport transportation chores upon arrival and departure at the Perth International Airport, with some of those flights at most inhumane hours. They also hosted traditional Aussie "barbies" before and after the operation for us.

A much appreciated by-product of this trip was being awarded the DXpedition of the Year® award from the SouthWest Ohio DX Association at the DX Dinner® at Dayton this year. It is special to be recognized by your peers.

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This is the 160m antenna shortly after EY8MM, LA6VM, K0IR and several members of the Braveheart crew finished putting up this revised, much taller antenna. It “rocked”!!

While passing out accolades, I have to return to the opening comments about INDEXA. We were well represented by members being part of the on-site team and the support team. I would like to recognize Glenn, N0IDX, who had personalized FT5ZM specific INDEXA yellow shirts printed for each team member at his own expense. I know he did not do that for public recognition, but each one of us wears our shirts with pride. We were also granted a nice sizeable grant from INDEXA to help offset the expense of making this trip a reality. Although about 50% of the funds came from those of us who actually make the journey, it would not have happened without other grants like that received from INDEXA. About 28% of the funding came from clubs and foundations. Thanks, guys and gals for your corporate support and individual support. It is just a hobby, but don't you agree it is a special hobby?!

As I said earlier, the hay is in the barn on this one, but winter is coming and it is time to store some more hay, don't you think? As we do, you can bet your bippy that INDEXA will be involved in the process. Thanks, Pick, ol' buddy, for getting me involved in this organization.

—73 *Jay*

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To the right is a picture of the French team and the FT5ZM operating team. The shirts worn by the island cadre was designed by the young lady helping Jorge, HK1R, hold up the Columbian flag. She was one of the two chefs on their team. We had enough of those T-shirts made up for us, them, the Braveheart crew and for other special folks! Of the 20 person French team there were two females. Not sure the French had ALL their priorities straight, with only two women. However, having 10% of the crew being qualified chefs was certainly the correct ratio for that metric! Food was excellent.



Meet INDEXA Director Gregg Marco, W6IZT



Gregg, first licensed in 1968, is a second generation ham and caught the DXing bug while living in Northern California in 1985. Today, Gregg and his YL Wendy live in Marietta GA. His operating QTH is about 75 miles to the north in Union County GA. An avid DXer, Gregg prefers the low bands. In total, Gregg has 348 DXCC entities confirmed. He has confirmed all 340 current entities with 335 on CW and 336 on SSB.

Gregg's first taste of being on the other end of the pile-up began with holiday style trips to FS St. Martin starting in 2001. Gregg and Wendy still try to get to FS every year. Gregg prefers to travel light, using a K3 with a simple light weight Inverted Vee fed with 300 ohm twin lead.

With a taste for being on the other side of a the pile-up Gregg's desire to participate in a major DXpedition quickly rose to the top of his bucket list. A chance meeting with Bob, K4UEE in Dayton in 2008

set the course for Gregg to join the K5D Desecheo team in 2009. (ironically, Gregg and Bob live just a few miles apart.) That trip was followed by PJ6A in 2010, and HK0NA in 2012. Gregg looks forward to the opportunity to go on the next big trip, but also would like to go on a small expedition with his daughter Jenna, KJ4PQV.

Gregg was also an off island member of the FT5ZM expedition. Responsible for PCs, logging, IT, and radio interfaces, Gregg also lead the development of a solution for the automation of log collection, consolidation and back-up enabling the team to focus on operating. The near real time collection and uploading of logs is the foundation of his vision to develop applications that will enable an expanded and more interactive experience for the stations working the DXpedition.

Gregg is also part of a group that is establishing a small contesting station on Saba at the vacation home of Jeff, NM1Y. Making small improvements over the past few years is starting to pay off, as the PJ6A team is starting to post some competitive results.

Other interests in the hobby include home brewing, antenna design and construction.

Gregg is currently employed in sales management at SeaChange International.

Gregg is both pleased and honored to have the opportunity to serve on the INDEXA Board of Directors.

THE QSL MAN® - W4MPY

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